

Ambassador Paul D. Wohlers Remarks
Opening of the Photo Exhibition of Ilina Arsova
International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women
Monday, 26 November 2012 – 18:00
Museum of the City of Skopje

Good evening Director Kondijanova, Ilina Arsova, special guests, ladies and gentlemen, and friends. It is such a pleasure to be here today with all of you. I want to thank you, Madame Director, for offering us this beautiful space for the exhibit. I also want to thank Ilina Arsova for sharing these beautiful photographs with all of us, taken during her climbing adventures from around the world.

This evening, we are surrounded by strong women, individuals who have worked hard - often against numerous challenges - and achieved success through determination and effort. All around us are one woman's example of success; Ilina's photographs from some of the world's highest peaks are a powerful manifestation of what one can achieve through strength and resilience.

Looking at these photographs, and speaking to strong and successful women like Ilina, Director Kondijanova, and so many others here, it is difficult to understand how the scourge of violence against women continues to such a terrible degree everywhere around the world. The United Nations estimates that up to 70% of all women in the world experience violence in their lifetimes. In the United States alone, the cost of violence against women exceeds \$5.8 billion per year: \$4.1 billion is for medical services, while productivity losses account for nearly \$1.8 billion.

On November 25, 1960, the Mirabel sisters, three female political activists in the Dominican Republic, were assassinated for having the courage to speak out against a dictator. As the story of the Mirabel sisters spread, men and women around the world began marking November 25 as a day to fight violence against women, until in 1999, the United Nations General Assembly designated November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The fight against violence against women is a top priority for the U.S. Government. Secretary Clinton has said that "gender-based violence is a global pandemic that cuts across all borders and impacts all peoples and societies – regardless of ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, or religion. One in three women around the world will experience some form of gender-based violence in her lifetime. The medical, security, and legal costs to

countries are incalculable. It dampens economic development and tears at the fabric of societies.”

So as we mark this important day, I am proud to be here to open this photo exhibition, featuring the work of Ilina Arsova. These photos are a testament to her success in a field dominated by men. They serve as an inspiration, particularly to young women, and remind us that challenges can be conquered.

Not only has Ilina already climbed some of the world’s highest peaks – and she is preparing for an Everest climb in the spring - she was also accepted as a participant in the State Department’s Global Sports Mentoring Program for women. She learned about developing and promoting adventure sports for women, as well as ways to organize humanitarian activities through sports, and continues to use sports as a way to empower women in Macedonia, and to inspire the next generation of young women here to embrace their own worth, their own goals, and their own inner strength.

More than 52 years after the Mirabel sisters were killed for demanding democratic rights and civil liberties, there still is work to be done and far too many women who are the victims of violence. The U.S. Embassy in Skopje will continue to do all we can to raise awareness of this global scourge, and to support the women of Macedonia in building a dynamic, violence-free environment in which they can achieve any goal and, like Ilina, reach any summit.